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ABSTRACT

The attitudes of selected superintendents in Illinois regarding Public Law 94-142 were studied. A review of related literature indicated that special education training and knowledge of PL 94-142 contributed to positive attitudes toward handicapped persons and the laws that apply to them. A questionnaire was sent to 300 local school superintendents in Illinois. The data thus collected yielded the following conclusions: (1) Superintendents in unit districts indicated a greater need for money to finance special education programs than superintendents in dual or high school districts; (2) older superintendents had a greater concern about school facilities for handicapped populations than younger superintendents; (3) superintendents with the specialist's degree and those from more highly populated districts had a greater concern about school and community relations in regard to handicapped populations; (4) superintendents from the southern part of Illinois were the most concerned about the finance of special education programs; (5) district's enrollment size had no significant effect upon superintendents' attitudes toward special education administration; and (6) superintendents of districts with high assessed valuation had more concern about special education curriculum. Further studies should be conducted to examine such issues as the attitude of boards of education and teachers toward handicapped students. (GJ)

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A STUDY OF PUBLIC LAW 94-142 AS VIEWED BY SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENTS IN ILLINOIS

by

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The education of handicapped persons, throughout the development of humanity, can be characterized as being inferior to the education of person who are more normal in their physical, mental, and social development (Abeson & Zettel, 1977). Two researchers described four distinct eras which have occurred since Greek times and which summarize the treatment of handicapped people since the beginning of humankind: the eras of extermination, ridicule, asylum, and education (Kolstoe & Frey, 1965). Beginning in the 1950's, research and training grants for educational personnel in special education were sponsored by the federal government (Hewett & Forness, 1974). Such federal recognition of the educational needs of the handicapped resulted in the passage in 1975 of the "Handicapped Children Act," also known as Public Law 94-142, by Congress. This legislation guaranteed the right of handicapped students to receive a free and appropriate education, regardless of their handicapping condition (Orelove, 1978). It also required local school districts to develop an individual educational plan (IEP) for each handicapped student, as identified by the local district (Lowenthal, 1979).

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Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the present study was to investigate the attitudes of selected superintendents pertaining to their assessment of the administrative task of carrying out the provisions of Public Law 94-142. After an extensive review of related literature, the effects of selected demographic variables were examined to determine the impact of such variables upon the attitude of the selected superintendents toward special education. The specific task areas of concern were school finance, curriculum and instruction, pupil personnel, staff recruitment, school and community relations, and physical facilities.

Related Studies

Upon reviewing court cases and legislation which contributed toward the passage of PL 94-142, it was found that the intention of this legislation was to implement by 1981 the right for the handicapped population to enjoy free public education (Joiner & Sabatino, 1981). The task specified to schools and school personnel through PL 94-142 was that both the "spirit" and the "letter" of the law be followed so that handicapped persons would have educational opportunities equal to those provided normal persons. The schools also were expected to develop programs for those students who required no substantial extra assistance. The school administrator was to be an active participant in the IEP process, so as to assure that handicapped students would be provided appropriate learning experiences in the local school setting.

A review of the literature pertaining to attitudes in respect to handicapped students indicated that teachers and administrators with training in special education have more positive attitudes toward handicapped students than do persons without such training (Zimbardo, Ebbeseb, & Maslach, 1977). The literature also indicated that those persons with the most knowledge about PL 94-142 tended to have more positive attitudes toward both the law itself and handicapped students in general than did persons without knowledge about PL 94-142 (Davis, 1979). It also was discovered that special education administrators

had more positive attitudes toward the handicapped students than did admininistrators with no special education background (Shelton, 1979).

Design of Study

For the purposes of the present investigation, a questionnaire was developed in order to obtain the attitude of selected superintendents toward the implementation of Public Law 94-142. A Likert-type instrument was developed and field-tested, requiring responses to statements pertaining to the six task areas as established in the legislation: school finance; curriculum and instruction; pupil personnel, staff recruitment, employment, and training; school and community relationships; and physical facilities.

It was determined that the following would be the independent variables for the investigation: type of school district, age and degrees held by the superintendent, area of the state in which the district was located, school enrollment, and nature of the school population. The attitude of the superintendent toward Public Law 94-142 was considered a dependent variable for the study.

After developing a preliminary instrument, two pilot studies were conducted for the purpose of improving the general structure and conciseness of the questions. The first pilot group was a graduate class in educational administration and the second group consisted of 30 practicing superintendents in Illinois, none of whom would be in the final survey population. Each pilot group judged the instrument on the bases of clearness, conciseness, and grammatical construction. Substantial changes were made in the instrument on the basis of information supplied by the two pilot groups.

Seven major research questions, 35 explanatory variables, and seven demographic variables were employed in the design of the study. The research methodology involved the use of an analysis of variance model, using the General Linear Models procedure. The Duncan's Multiple Range Test was used to determine significant differences among the means of the independent variables, as compared to the

dependent variables, for the task areas under investigation. The study was concerned with the determination of the existence of patterns of relationship between variables, without reference to causation.

In February, 1983, the survey instrument was mailed to a stratified random sample of 300 local school superintendents in Illinois. An 85.33 percent response rate was obtained. A one-time, follow-up procedure was used in order to improve the overall response rate.

Analysis of Data

A frequenty distribution was developed for each variable on the questionnaire. The basic analytical technique of regression analysis was used in the study. The General Linear Models procedure was applied to analyze the relationship between classification and continuous variables. The focus of the multiple regression technique was the response to the Likert-type attitude scale. The test statistic employed was the F distribution, with critical values ascertained from an F table. The probability level set for determining significance was .05.

The reliability of the instrument was obtained through an internal consistency approach; the Kuder-Richardson Formula was used to determine the covariance among all of the items of the six administrative task areas, as identified above. The following reliabilities were obtained: (1) .733 for finance, (2) -.342 for curriculum, (3) .258 for pupil personnel, (4) .614 for staff recruitment, (5) .579 for school and community relations, and (6) -.093 for physical facilities.

Major Findings

Demographic data indicated that those responding were almost identical to the total population of Illinois school superintendents in terms of the seven demographic variables: type of school district, age level of the respondents, highest degree held by the respondents,

state education region, enrollment of the district, assessed valuation of the district, and population of the district.

In respect to seven working hypotheses which were identified at the outset of the study, the following major trends were identified:

1. Factor of type of district. Superintendents in unit districts indicated a greater need for finance for special education than did dual district and high school district superintendents. In respect to the other task areas, no significant difference was found between the type of district and each of the other task areas.

2. Factor of age of superintendent. Superintendents over age 61 indicated a greater concern toward the need for special education facilities than did superintendents in the 31-40 age group. No other significant differences were found between the ages of the respondents and the six administrative task areas.

3. Factor of highest degree held by superintendent. Superintendents with the specialist's degree as the highest degree held were more concerned about school and community relations than were those with a doctorate. No other significant differences were determined to exist between the highest degree held by the respondents and the six administrative task areas.

4. Factor of region of the state. Significant differences were discovered in respect to the location of the superintendent and the task areas of finance, school and community relations, and physical facilities. No differences were discovered in respect to the other three task areas.

5. Factor of enrollment of school. No significant differences were found between the enrollment of the school in which the superintendent served and the attitudes of the respondents to the six administrative task areas.

6. Factor of assessed valuation of district. Superintendents from the more wealthy districts tended to have more concern toward curriculum and staff recuritment for the handicapped than did those of the districts with smaller assessed valuations. In other task areas, no significant differences existed between such areas and the assessed valuation of the districts where the superintendents were serving.

7. Factor of population of district. Superintendents in districts of 10,001 to 20,000 population indicated a greater concern for school and community relations for the handicapped than did those superintendents from the districts with populations of more than 20,000. No other significant differences were indicated between the task areas and population.

Conclusions

The following conclusions seem warranted, on the basis of the data obtained from the respondents:

1. Superintendents in unit districts indicated a greater need for money to finance special education programs than did superintendents in dual or high school districts.
2. Older superintendents had a greater concern about school facilities for handicapped populations than did younger superintendents.
3. Superintendents with the specialist's degree had a greater concern about school and community relations in regard to handicapped populations than did superintendents with the doctorate.
4. Superintendents from the southern part of Illinois were more concerned about the finance of special education programs than were those superintendents from the middle and northern parts of the state.
5. The size of the enrollment of the district in this study had no significant effect upon the attitudes of superintendents toward the task areas of administration, as pertaining to special education.
6. Superintendents of districts with high assessed valuation had more concern about the curriculum of special education programs than did those superintendents from districts with low assessed valuation.
7. Superintendents in the more highly populated districts tended to have less concern about school and community relations in regard to handicapped populations than did those superintendents from the districts with smaller populations.

Recommendations for Additional Study

On the basis of the evidence obtained from the present study, the following areas are recommended for further study:

1. Further studies should be conducted to assess the attitude of boards of education toward handicapped students, using the procedures of the present study.

2. A long-range study should be conducted to assess the cumulative effect upon the attitudes of superintendents toward handicapped populations.

3. Additional studies should be directed to assess the effect of the attitudes of teachers toward handicapped students.

4. Other studies should be directed toward the attitudes of the state board of education and its employees toward handicapped students.

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Digest of the article, "A Study of Public Law 94-142 as Viewed by School Superintendents in Illinois," by William H. Koenecke and Elmer J. Clark.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the attitudes of a stratified sampling of Illinois school superintendents toward programs for handicapped students, as specified under the provisions of Public Law 94-142. Of the 300 superintendents in the sample group, 256 (85.33%) responded to a Likert-type questionnaire. The dependent variable was the attitude of the respondents to P. L. 94-142; the independent variables were the six task areas established by that legislation.

Demographic data indicated that those responding were almost identical to the total population in terms of the seven demographic variables. Major conclusions included the following:

1. Superintendents in unit districts indicated a greater need for money to finance special education programs than did superintendents in dual or high school districts.

2. Older superintendents had a greater concern about school facilities for handicapped populations than did younger superintendents.

3. Superintendents of districts with high assessed valuation had more concern about the curriculum of special education programs than did those superintendents from districts with low assessed valuation.

4. Superintendents in the more highly populated districts tended to have less concern about school and community relations in regard to handicapped populations than did those superintendents from the districts with smaller populations.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE WRITERS OF THE ARTICLE, "A Study of Public Law 94-142 as Viewed by School Superintendents in Illinois"

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